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Written statement* submitted by the Verein Sudwind Entwicklungspolitik, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 May 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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UN Executive Board Members Should Respect Human and Women's Rights

UN bodies and UN member states are all bound by their overarching obligations under the Charter of the United Nations (Articles 1, 55 and 56) to promote 'universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms. In addition the unanimously adopted Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action state that democracy, development, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. In 1997, the Secretary-General called on all entities of the UN system to mainstream human rights into their various activities and programmes within the framework of their respective mandates. Since then a number of UN agencies have adopted a human rights-based approach.

This human rights approach, however, is not fully reflected in the processes for nominating and electing executive board members as the governing body of different organs, since highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights seem to be no binding condition of membership. For instance the Islamic Republic of Iran serves on various UN bodies, including the governing council of the U.N refugee agency (UNHCR), the executive board of the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the U.N. Development Programme (UNDP). Despite the fact that according to the recent Secretary-General Report individuals in the I.R. Iran have increasingly been targeted for their alleged contacts with United Nations human rights mechanisms. Furthermore the reports states that arbitrary detention and prosecution of journalists, human rights defenders and women rights activists have continued.

The I. R. Iran was reelected to the UN's Commission on the Status of Women and will become in January 2016 a member of the executive board of the U.N. Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (U.N. Women). Though as reported by the Secretary-General the Women's rights in the I.R. Iran remain a priority concern, particularly underage marriages and the underrepresentation of women in the labour force and in decision-making positions.

In most election processes leading to membership of I.R. Iran in the governor's board, the I.R. Iran was on a "closed slate" of candidates put forward by its Asia regional group. The contentious practice, which entails submitting the same numbers of candidates as there are vacancies available, regularly rules out any consideration and complaints. Unless objections are raised, there is no actual vote, and the regionally-endorsed candidates are instead given the nod by "acclamation". For the board of UN Women the 54-member of the U.N. Economic and Social Council held after objections a secret ballot on the uncontested Asia-Pacific regional slate, therefore the ECOSOC member states had the opportunity to choose from among around 50 countries in Asia, including the five countries endorsed by the group, to fill the five vacancies. The low vote total that the I.R. Iran received testifies to the deep concerns U.N. member states had about Iran gaining a position on the board of UN Women, however an adequate number of states handed the I.R. Iran 36 votes, well over the 27-vote minimum.

The I.R. Iran has not yet ratified the CEDAW and negative propaganda by the Iranian authorities is directed against gender equality, a term not used in official Iranian documents and public statements, wording gender justice instead. Furthermore during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) all recommendations on equal rights for women or gender equality did not enjoy the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

This view results in a host of discriminatory practices that affect women in their public and private lives. For example, in courts the monetary damages for causing the death of a women is half that of a man's. A women's testimony is also worth half of that of a man's and women are barred from holding some government positions, there are no laws against domestic violence or FGM, but laws permitting honor killing, which is one of the most serious forms of violence against women within the family. Gender inequality in the Islamic Republic of Iran is structuralized and institutionalized. At the 57th session of CSW the Iranian government has already shown its intentions towards women's rights and its harmful impact on policy-making bodies for promotion and protection of women rights. The Islamic Republic of Iran as a member of CSW board in cooperation with some other countries blocked the paragraph (nn) from the draft resolution. This paragraph emphasized on adoption and acceleration of the implementation of laws, policies

and programs which protect and enable the enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for women, including their sexual and reproductive rights, in accordance with the Program of Action of International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action and their review outcomes is a step backward.

In the light of above it seems inappropriate that the I.R. Iran is voted a leadership role on women's rights within the UN System since the full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination and violence on grounds of sex are priority objectives of the UN and the international community.

All activities of the United Nations should be enhanced in order to promote the objectives of universal respect for observance of international human rights standards, therefore all inter-governmental bodies within the United Nations system must uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights as a condition of executive board membership. The inter-governmental body within the United Nations system that should set an example and has dedicated a General Recommendation to human rights standards of its membership is the Human Rights Council. The General Assembly resolution 60/251 expressly set that those states elected as members of the Human Rights Council must uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights as a condition of membership. This approach can only be satisfied if there are also competitive elections in which UN member states are offered the possibility of choosing among candidates for available seats on other UN Organs. A clean slate leaves no electoral choice to the UN member states not involved in determining the slate and thereby frustrates their right of vote.

Sudwind calls on the Human Rights Council to urge all States to:

- Bearing in mind the centrality of human rights to the aims of the United Nations and always take the human rights perspective into account while nominating and electing members of UN organs.
- Electing states on the basis of their proven expertise and engagement in relevant areas, such as the ratification of CEDAW to become a member of the executive board of UN women, and their willingness to undertake duties associated with the mandate of the entity. Therefore States should be appointed not only in a manner that ensures equitable geographic representation.
- Offering UN member states the possibility of choosing among candidates for the available seats of UN bodies by ensuring that there will be more candidates than vacant seats available in their slates.